critical digest

Vol. II No. 32 May 29, 1950
The Weekly That Keeps You Informed of the Current Broadway Critical Scene

N.Y.Opening This Week

The Show Off-Arena, Hotel Edison, 5/31/50. Lee Tracy stars in the first theatre round production of David Heilwell and Derrick Lynn Thomas. George Kelly comedy revival is directed by Martin Manulis. Production will run three weeks.

Daily Critics Rate the Revival

A Streetcar Named Desire-City Centre, 5/23/50. Irene Selznick presentation of the Tennessee Williams prize winning play, directed by Elia Kazan was well received by all but one of the critics in its final stop on a long tour of the nation. Anthony Quinn and Uta Hagen have the leading roles. Garland, Journal American, was the dissenter. Admitting he may have seen the play once too many times, he confessed he felt no sympathy for the main character. But the rest of the first night clan are still convinced it is one of the most striking plays of the contemporary theatre. Atkinson, Times, felt the large auditorium switched the emphasis of the play away from Blanche; while Chapman, News, asked for more light onstage. Several accused Quinn of mumbling. Three critics reported that balcony patrons cried "louder" several times.

Saga of Opening & Closing & Opening

The Liar-Broadhurst, 5/18/50. Producers Dorothy Willard and Thomas Hammond read the depressing notices of the daily critics on the Alfred Drake-Edward Eager-John Mundy musical version of the 17th century Goldoni play and decided to close the show after four performances. They also placed an inspired closing notice in the NY Times showing a swashbuckler tacking an "OOPS" notice on the theatre. The "OOPS" undoubtedly was the $160,000 spent on the production. Saturday's rave review from Danton Walker, who billed the show as a happy time The Consul, plus an appreciative Saturday night audience caused the producers to withdraw the closing notice. Williams Eythe, Melville Cooper, Paula Lawrence, Barbara Ashley and the producers appeared on dozens of radio and television programs plugging the show. WNYC played the entire score on an afternoon program.

But the magazine reviewers weren't enthused. Newsweek critic found much in the show's favor including music by Mundy, but blamed Drake for not making it as sprightly as it should have been. Barbara Ashley was the hit of the show for him. Lardner, New Yorker, thought it had a certain confused charm and a sort of incoherent originality, but not enough to overcome bad spots. Trade paper critics and Gabriel, Cue, panned it.

Closing This Week in N.Y.

The Devil's Disciple-Royale, 2/21/50-2/27/50. Maurice Evans, Dennis King, Victor Jory and Marsha Hunt starred in Shaw revival. Play had been produced earlier in the season at City Center and brought downtown after rave reviews. Gibbs, New Yorker, was the only critic who thought 1897 play was dated.

Traveling Mr. Atkinson

Three show stops made an interesting week's trip for Atkinson, Times. The Long Moment, Jo Sinclair's study of a Negro musician "passing" produced at the Cleveland Play House, was deemed a step in the right direction, But the play had too many rough edges. Pittsburgh Playhouse's Fifty Grand won a rave review as a top flight musical. Smith & Dale, now appearing at the N.Y.Palace anniversary vaudeville show, were urged never to change their Dr. Kronkhite sketch.

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' The Green Room Department '

VALLEE BLASTS SHUBERTS...Rudy Vallee, heard daily on his WOR disc jockey show, devoted a full program to a not so gentle attack on the Shubert empire. He fully agrees with the Justice Department monopoly charge and condemns the hard trading tactics of the Shuberts. The crooner expects the case to drag out in court for some time.

IDEA OF THE WEEK...Why not give the 7:00 P.M. curtain idea a once a week test suggests Morehouse, WT&S. Plan which was instituted in London during the war became so popular it has been retained. Early curtain would enable many suburbanites to have dinner, go to the theatre and still get home by midnite. Lee Tracy, WOR Theatrical Page, backed up the plan. He promises to forward any comments from his listeners on the subject to the managers.

ANTI ARENA THEATRE...Arenas are for bullfights, ballrooms are for drinking and dancing and George Jean Nathan doesn't think plays belong in either. While he does hope the Arena Theatre production of The Show Off in the ballroom of the Edison Hotel is successful, he isn't too optimistic.

CRITICS ON CRITICS...The reviewers are more lenient and less likely to wisecrack at the expense of performer and play, Pollock, Compass and Rice, Post, agreed in considering their answers to Variety's poll...Garland, Journal American, thinks he has worked out a convenient arrangement with Variety. They don't agree with anything he says, and vice versa. He told Peter Roberts, WNBC Critics Corner, why he disliked almost every choice in the Variety poll of the critics.

SURVEY TIME...Atkinson, Times, topped Variety's 27th Annual box score of the NY daily critics. Trade paper rates reviewers as to how accurately they predicted the hits and flops of the season. Coleman, Mirror, was second while Hawkins, WT&S, was last. Paper points out that critics liked more plays than the ticket buying public supported. Atkinson picked 39 right out of 47 productions. Herald Tribune lists 56 productions since last June 1st.

SECOND 25 YEARS...Richard Rodgers 25th anniversary in show business was honored by many radio and television programs. Theatre Guild cocktail party was taped by WNBC Hi Jinx. Rodgers hopes that he and Hammerstein will turn out one musical a year from now on, Anna and the King of Siam is due in the fall.

FRY REVIEW...Theatregoers may be able to see three Christopher Fry plays in the fall. So Sheaffer, Eagle, wants to make sure they don't scorn them because of the recent flop of A Phoenix Too Frequent. Interesting and witty as this playlet was the critic points out that it was written before the English poet hit his stride.

' Critical Notes '

John Chapman, News, signed by Clark Gettis Agency for summer lecture tour... Three members of the entertainment staff of WT&S writing books...George Jean Nathan's recent piece on poor stage lighting said to be inspired by famous actress...Union plans counteraction...Ethel Waters isn't granting interviews, says WOR Lee Darton, 80, one time dean of NY drama critics, who held the reviewer's post on the NY Evening World for 21 years, died in Hollywood. Joseph Gollumb, 68, drama critic of the NY Evening Mail in the 1920s died in New York...Paul Meyer, who for 30 years published Theatre Magazine, is now active as public relations director of Davis, Delaney, Inc. printers, New York...Theatre Time Magazine has awarded Robert Garland, Journal American, an engraved pencil for having done "the most for the theatre during the season". John Mason Brown, SRL, will write the narration for a French made feature length fact film "Paris 1900"...Wolcott Gibbs, New Yorker, on mend from severe bronchitis.

' Off Broadway '

Negro students at Hunter and City Colleges joined forces to present Owen Dodson's Bayou Legend, a southern version of Peer Gynt, at the Hunter Playhouse. Trade paper critics considered it interesting experiment, but advised against taking play to Broadway...Abbe Practical Workshop's production of three short plays by Saroyan, Millay and Dunsany meet with mixed reaction. Atkinson liked Saroyan's Once Around the Moon and the two revivals, but didn't think the acting was on a par with the writing...Garland, Journal American, visited Paper Mill Playhouse, Millburn, New Jersey to see their home grown operetta Waltz for Three. Much to his surprise he discovered it was the same show, but with a new title, that he had seen three years before. The cast wasn't as good as the material and the production.

' Interview Round Up '

MARCIA HENDERSON...Wendy of Peter Pan plans to read all she can about the theatre, Pollock, Compass, was informed over tea during the cocktail hour. She might also study psychology at Columbia. In her home town of Williamstown, Massachusetts, the 20 year old actress received advice from Sinclair Lewis, Cole Porter and Jean Arthur. Her father sends all her clippings to Lewis in Italy.

RALPH ALSWANG...Designer of Peter Pan and Tickets Please! saw both his sets unveiled on Broadway the same week. He helped save the producers much money, he revealed to Rice, Post. Kensington Park, in the Barrie classic, is presented as Central Park. Alswang is glad the critics liked the permanent unit he designed for the Hartman revue; it cost half the usual price of musical sets.

MARSHA HUNT...The critics favorite in The Devil's Disciple came to Broadway via the motion pictures. A New Yorker, she was always picture struck, never stage struck. She likes the motion pictures because of the satisfaction received from doing a scene over until it is perfect. She likes the stage because of the warm, responsive audiences, she detailed on WOR Barbara Welles.

ALLEN MARTIN, JR....Thirteen year old veteran of six Broadway plays is now seen on Broadway as the Boston rich boy in I Know My Love. He also made his screen debut in "Johnny Holiday". In spite of the publicity shots for the picture, he is a non-smoker. When Field, Mirror, asked if he liked pictures or plays better, he replied, "That's like asking me whom I like best -- my mother or my father."

FREDERICK LONSDALE...The leisure classes are finished, work is wonderful, the English author advised Robb, Journal American, during a lunch at a Second Avenue restaurant. The Way Things Go, Lonsdale's newest drawing room comedy, will be presented here in the fall. It deals with the plight of the new poor. There is no message in the play, just a plain drawing room comedy in a new locale.

' Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance '

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them, not if they think they will be hits. "So-So" means the critic did not state directly if he recommended the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening. Photostats of reviews may be obtained at 25 cents each to subscribers, 50 cents each to others.

1. NY Times
2. NY Herald Tribune
3. NY News
4. NY Mirror
5. NY Compass (Star, PM)
11. Newark News
12. Women's Wear Daily
13. Daily Worker
14. Wall Street Journal
15. Journal of Commerce
21. Catholic World
22. Commonweal
23. Cue
24. Chr.Sci.Monitor
25. Sat.Review Lit.

6. NY Post
7. NY Sun (Morehouse)
8. NY Journal American
9. NY World Telegram & Sun
10. Brooklyn Eagle
16. George Jean Nathan
17. Morning Telegraph
18. Variety
19. Billboard
20. Theatre Arts
26. Newsweek
27. Time
28. Nation
29. New Republic
30. New Yorker

Arms and the Girl-46th Street Theatre, 2/2/50. Pro: 3-5-10-11-12-14-15-17-19-23-24-30. Con: 1-7-8-16-20-29. So-So: 2-6-9-26-27.

As You Like It-Cort, 1/26/50. Pro: 3-4-6-7-9-10-11-12-16-17-18-19-20-22-26-29. Con: 1-2-23-24-25-27-30. So-So: 5-8-14-28.

Clutterbuck-Biltmore, 12/3/49. Pro: 3-5-6-7-8-12-15-17-19-20-21-23-27-30. Con: 1-9-11-13-16-18-22-24-26-28-29. So-So: 2-4-10-14.

The Cocktail Party-Miller, 1/2/50. Pro: 2-3-4-5-6-7-8-10-11-12-15-17-18-19-20-23-24-26-27-28. Con: 1-9-14-22-25-29. So-So: 16-30.

Come Back, Little Sheba-Booth, 2/15/50. Pro: 1-5-8-9-10-11-14-16-17-18-19-20-22 23-26-29. Con: 2-4-7-12-27. So-So: 3-6-30.

The Consul-Barrymore, 3/15/50. Pro: 26 votes. Con: 22 So-So: 6-29. None: 20-21.

Death of a Salesman-Morosco, 2/10/49. Pro: 28 votes. Con: 29. So-So: 27.

Detective Story-Hudson, 3/23/49. Pro: 1-2-3-4-6-7-8-9-12-14-15-17-18-19-20-21-22-23-26-27-30.

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes-Ziegfield, 12/8/49. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 6-21-28. So-So: 16-22-27. None: 25.

The Happy Time-Plymouth, 1/24/50. Pro: 20 votes. Con: 5-6-7-20-26-27-28-30. None: 13-21.

I Know My Love-Shubert, 11/1/49. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 1-5-16-20-22-27-29-30.

The Innocents-Playhouse, 2/1/50. Pro: 24 votes. Con: 2-4-28-29-30. None: 21.

Kiss Me, Kate-Century, 12/31/48. Pro: 28 votes. Con: 29. None: 28.

The Liar-Broadhurst, 5/18/50. Pro: 12. Con: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-1-11. So-So: 9.

Lost in the Stars-Music Box, 10/30/49. Pro: 1-2-3-5-6-7-10-11-12-14-15-17-18-23-26. Con: 8-9-13-20-21-22-24-25-28-29-30. So-So: 4-27.

The Member of the Wedding-Empire, 1/5/50. Pro: 25 votes. Con: 16. So-So: 2-27-30

Mister Roberts-Alvin, 2/13/48. Pro: 24 votes. Con: 21-24. So-So: 13-16-17.

Peter Pan-Imperial, 4/24/50. Pro: 1-2-3-4-5-9-10-11-12-15-17-18-22-23-24-25-26-27-29. Con: 8-16-30. So-So: 6-7-14-19.

South Pacific-Majestic, 4/8/49. Pro: 1-2-3-4-6-7-8-9-12-15-17-18-19-20-21-24-25-26-30. Con: 27. So-So: 23.

Texas Li'l Darlin'-Hellinger-11/25/49. Pro: 3-6-9-12-13-14-15-15-17-21-22-24, Con: 1-4-7-8-18-19-23-29-30. So-So: 2-5-10-11-20-26-27.

Where's Charley?-St. James-10/11/48. Pro: 16 votes. Con: 6-7-12-13-16-19-22-24-25-26. So-So: 4-27.

The Wisteria Trees-Martin Beck, 3/29/50. Pro: 1-3-4-5-6-8-11-12-14-15-17-19-24. Con: 2-7-9-10-16-22-23-25-26-27-28-30. So-So: 18-29.

Tickets Please!-Coronet, 4/27/50. Pro: 1-2-3-4-5-6-8-9-10-12-13-14-15-17-19-20-22-23-24-29. Con: 11-16-27-30. So-So: 26.